

SB129 – SUPPORT

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Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

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Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

My name is Laura Atwood. I have lived in Maryland (D20) since 1999, and while I am active in a number of local organizations, I am writing today as an individual in SUPPORT of SB129.

I'm aware that this is an election year, yet I still expect the legislature to move forward with strong commitment to Maryland residents who cannot afford to wait for justice.

I was so proud of your role in getting the groundbreaking bill, Dignity Not Detention, passed last year. Shrinking the supply of local beds (ICE loves to fill a vacuum...), and refusing to be complicit in a system of suffering, are moves to be deeply proud of.

Yet this bill did leave a gap, and SB129 would close that gap. To all those Republicans who professed concern about immigrants' well-being—"But how could we possibly take people farther from their lawyers?!"—here is the answer: SB129. We know that a small percentage of people detained on immigration charges have had lawyers to begin with, and they have fared much better than their counterparts without lawyers. We also know that even before DND passed, ICE transferred people regularly, so residents of other states were detained in Maryland, and vice versa.

But: Yes, what about those Maryland residents who are detained in other states? The number is expected to be lower than before (again, related to supply & demand of ICE beds), but these are human beings who shouldn't suffer unintended consequences, a type of collateral damage. SB129 would still protect these residents, now to be detained in other states.

Furthermore, SB129 fills a gap in our society's spirit of access to counsel; people facing criminal charges, who cannot afford a lawyer, are entitled to a public defender. The consequences of deportation are severe—we know that too often, deportation is family separation and/or a death sentence. The criminal legal system and immigration enforcement have become so enmeshed; it honestly seems like a no-brainer that people who are detained and facing deportation should be entitled to legal representation.

Please continue to do what is deeply right. I urge a favorable report on SB129.